

of entries, but in practice it virtually barred clubs in distant centres from participating and made the final competition in reality a contest between organizations in or near the Festival city. The preponderance of clubs from Toronto in the 1910 Festival bears out this fact. In order to survive, therefore, the Festival had to incorporate a system of regional play-offs (as the Dominion Drama Festival now has), if not simply to eliminate the vast numbers, at least to put the competition on a representative basis. However, the cost of implementing such a scheme was beyond the means at the disposal of the committee, so that the Festival which had begun as a noble attempt to bring the forces of Canadian theatre together, was eventually doomed by the very size and complexity of the elements it sought to unify. For the moment, the Festival did serve the needs of the growing theatre in Canada since it gave recognition to the leading figures of the day and brought to light the problems similar ventures in the future would have to face.

2. Schools of Elocution and Expression

The activities of the Dramatic Club of Margaret Eaton School, which actually won the local judges' nomination to Ottawa in 1907, were limited to a single showing of the club's entry, and that was held at the Greek Theatre of the school on April 15, 1907, under the direction of

Mrs. Scott Raff.

What prevented the Margaret Eaton School company from participating in the competition in Ottawa is not clear, nor is it certain whether the group presenting She Stoops to Conquer was made up of students of the school or amateurs in the city who were associated with an extra-curricular drama group having its headquarters at the school. Whatever the situation might have been, the first year at Margaret Eaton School of Literature and Expression was one of organization, and little effort was concentrated on theatricals at the school.

The second year was similarly barren of dramatic productions. In 1908-9, however, the school became involved in a unique development which had begun the previous year when an unidentified amateur company under Douglas A. Paterson and Robert S. Pigott had produced W. B. Yeats's "Deirdre" and Pinero's "The Money Spinners" for the first time in Toronto.¹ By so doing, they initiated what might be called a local cult of Irish literature, for in the new season there was a veritable rush among amateur organizations to present plays by the leaders of the Irish Literary Movement. The activity was divided between the University of Toronto and the Margaret Eaton School, and in both institutions Mrs. Scott Raff acted

¹This group could have been the Sheridan Players. See Globe, Toronto (December 25, 1909), p. 14.

as a kind of high priestess of the new order.

At the Margaret Eaton School, Mrs. Scott Raff conducted a series on Irish literature similar to the one at the university, and she gave a reading of such plays as Yeats's The Shadowy Waters.¹ Furthermore, as director of the Associate Players of the Margaret Eaton School (a group not connected with the classes), she produced a bill of three short Irish plays -- "Cathleen Ni Houlihan" and "The Pot of Broth" by Yeats, and "Hyacinth Holvey" by Lady Gregory.² Mrs. Scott Raff's apparent sudden interest in the Irish Literary Movement is easy to explain: in the facile poetic dramas of Yeats and Lady Gregory, she found her "objective correlative," since the poetry of the plays presented the supreme test for the elocutionist's talents, and yet the plays themselves provided ample opportunity for experimentation with new settings and stage techniques seen in the Abbey Theatre productions; most important, the plays, embodying all the noble qualities of an ancient chivalry, could find approval with any audience.

But something else in the works of the Irish playwrights appealed to Mrs. Scott Raff: here was a truly national literature wrought out of the very history and language of

¹Globe, Toronto (May 14, 1909), p. 12.

²Ibid.

a people, written by native dramatists, acted in an independent national theatre by indigenous players, and "unspoiled by the conventions of the European stage."¹ Here indeed was the model for theatre-minded Canadians eager to establish a national theatre movement in the Dominion. Perhaps she hoped that one had only to introduce Canadians to the poetic beauty and sound dramatic structure of the Irish plays, and they would be inspired to similar achievements.

Although no such results were immediately forthcoming, the Associate Players of the Margaret Eaton School under the leadership of Mrs. Scott Ruff continued pioneering the production of plays from the Irish Literary Movement. Besides their contributions to the Earl Grey Festival, the players engaged in further experimentation in stage techniques, producing in 1909-10. another program of Irish plays including Lady Gregory's "The Rising of the Moon" and "Hyacinth Holvey," as well as Yeats's "Cathleen Ni Houlihan."

At the newly re-organized Toronto Conservatory of Music, the School of Expression under Douglas A. Paterson's direction was experiencing a revival of theatrical activity on a scale not seen since the days of H. N. Shaw's dramatic classes at the old Toronto College of Music. Mr. Paterson was already well known in the city's amateur circles as a

¹Una Ellis-Fermor, "Ireland," The Oxford Companion to the Theatre, Phyllis Hartnoll, ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 388.

Shea's where less refined music was heard. At the Majestic and other "show-play" theatres, the accent was on melodramatic pieces usually with a western flavour.

Unemployment, arising from crop failures in 1907, cut attendance at local houses; but for those who could still afford the luxury, there was the occasional novelty of a photoplay, a form of entertainment which was becoming increasingly popular. The moving pictures, however, evoked some consternation among the more conservative elements in Toronto, who believed they prompted slang and improper behavior. These people, who prided themselves on the fact that the so-called Ibsen cult had not taken hold in Toronto,¹ were the same ones who objected to the innovation of darkening the theatre during a theatrical performance.

8. Conclusion

At the end of the 1909-10 season the major influences at work within amateur theatre in Toronto were clearly discernible. By right of their determined efforts at experimentation, the Associate Players of the Margaret Eaton School deserve to be ranked foremost of all the city's organizations. Signal honours must go to Mrs. Scott Raff under whose direction the Players introduced

¹See the article on the Ibsen cult in the Globe, Toronto (April 28, 1908), p. 12.

Toronto to dramatic techniques and stage presentation hitherto unseen in local circles. Mrs. Scott Raff must again be applauded for stirring enthusiasm for play production among the women students at the University of Toronto. Out of the productions by the University Women's Dramatic Club developed those qualities which were to make the University a major theatre centre. Finally, special mention must be made of Mrs. Scott Raff's achievements in her regular classes at the Margaret Eaton School; for "by 1910, with a group of twenty-nine graduates, the school was established as a centre for Language, Literature, Dramatic Art and Physical Education."¹

The training of young people in the arts of the theatre was also the task of instructors at the Toronto Conservatory of Music's School of Expression. The productions by the drama classes marked it as one of the more prominent organizations. Of the other schools of expression in the city, little was heard, and it can be assumed that their impact on local theatrical developments was negligible; they did, however, turn out a new generation equipped to view the theatre with more understanding and appreciation.

Another source of extremely fine amateur productions was found in the work of the Dickens Fellowship Players who besides their sheer enthusiasm for Dickensiana, brought

¹Jackson, p. 10.

from the new burgeoning branch of American playwriting. In essence, this was the "Little Theatre Movement."¹

Margaret Eaton School of Literature and Expression

No other local amateur organization had more closely approached the ideal of the Little Theatre Movement than did the Associate Players of Margaret Eaton School, and they continued to experiment in presenting plays which rarely came to the stage in Toronto. In the 1910-11 season the players gave two evenings of interesting plays; at the first, Mrs. Scott Raff read Yeats's "The Shadowy Waters," and for the other selection on the program she teamed with two bright young actors, Miss Dora Mavor and Basil Morgan, in a presentation of Iphigenia. In March, they offered a triple bill which included "The Land of Heart's Desire" and "Spreading the News;" in the cast were Miss Mavor, Mr. Morgan and Miss Topley Thomas, who later joined the faculty at the school as an instructor in the Art of Expression.

Mrs. Scott Raff brought some of the enthusiasm of the Associate Players into her regular duties at the School of Literature and Expression; there she revived classical Greek plays, and introduced several other innovations into the activities at the school, as the following account of the 1910-11 term reveals:

¹"Nationwide Theatre, U.S.A.," Phyllis Hartnoll, ed., Oxford Companion to the Theatre (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 561.

Graduates will recall the Studio Recitals which were highlights of the Voice Production classes, and the various plays presented by the Department of Dramatic Art. In this respect the Margaret Eaton School of Literature and Expression definitely may be considered to have been a forerunner of the Canadian Little Theatre movement. The first Tuesday Evening Literary Class organized by Mrs. Scott Raff for the study of Browning opened in 1910 with an attendance of ten. Five years later the membership was two hundred and eleven.¹

Unfortunately, after the achievements of 1910-11, it seems that her duties as principal of the school demanded increasingly of Mrs. Scott Raff's time, for she apparently withdrew from active participation in the Associate Players, and as a result, the company disappeared for several years. However, in 1914, Farnum Barton re-established the group with a strong membership composed of such actors as George G. Nasmith (who later married Mrs. Scott Raff),² Mrs. Farnum Barton, and Miss Helen McPetridge (a graduate of the school and a member of the staff).³ But the new company did not display the spirit of adventure in their programs that had marked the productions of Irish drama four years before.

¹Dorothy Jackson, The Brief History of Three Schools: The School of Expression, The Margaret Eaton School of Literature and Expression, and The Margaret Eaton School (Toronto, 1953), p. 10.

²Jackson, op. cit., p. 13.

³Ibid.

VIII

TOWARD CONSOLIDATION: 1925 - 1931

1. The Players' Club and Bertram Forsyth

The amalgamation of the Players' Club and Mr. Forsyth after their break with the university theatre provided Hart House with its first major challenge for the supremacy of theatre in Toronto. No other local organization could present such a formidable array of talent as that which came to be known as the Players' Club of Toronto. Besides a corps of polished actors and an inspired director, the new organization possessed a theatre which could accommodate several hundred more than Hart House, and which, being newly renovated, contained the most modern facilities in the city.¹ Located on McGill Street, the new theatre was part of the property taken over by the Margaret Eaton School when it transferred from "The Greek Temple" to 415 Yonge Street in

¹Varsity, Toronto (October, 1925).

order to make way for the extension of Bay Street.¹

The Players' Club's connection with the new theatre came through Bertram Forsyth; as Principal of the Margaret Eaton School and Director of Drama and Literature, he arranged for the leasing of it to the club for productions, the first of which took place in October, 1925, when the club (appearing under the name of the Margaret Eaton Players²) presented Shaw's Caesar and Cleopatra. The seven additional productions of the season -- all as impressive and exciting as the first -- ranged from works by Ibsen and Chekhov to Bastien and Bastienne (with a new libretto supplied by Mr. Forsyth).³ Also included, of course, was the Players' Club Revue, entitled that year, The Cuckoo Clock, which served as the finale to the first season. Ironically, however, this happy production was to be the last ever given by the club, for it disbanded shortly afterward.

The explanation for this action is complicated, but it can be traced to a situation which had been developing at Margaret Eaton School for over a year. It had become clear with the resignation of Mrs. Scott Nasmith in

¹Dorothy N. R. Jackson, A Brief History of Three Schools(Toronto, 1953), p. 21.

²Varsity, Toronto(October 6, 1925), p. 2.

³The club intended to perform Juno and the Paycock but was unable to obtain production rights. See Varsity, Toronto(February 16, 1926), p. 2.and (February 19, 1926), p. 2.



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